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AUTHOR Hamp-Lyons, Liz
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ABSTRACT

A study investigated whether transfer from native to second language in writing occurs, and if so, whether the different rhetorical structures that student writers from other cultures bring to the task of writing in English affect their writing in ways that may affect the grades assigned by experienced raters. To do so, the processes used by essay raters in responding to writing products were analyzed. Four raters evaluated 20 academic essays written by non-native graduate students of various language backgrounds at the University of Edinburgh (Scotland), and commented on the features of the writing leading to their assessments. Excerpts of the comments for five papers are presented. It is suggested that there is enough evidence in these comments to warrant further research on the significance of language transfer on writing assessment, on the interlinguistic differences in transfer, and on techniques of writing instruction to address this issue. A 37-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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7. Writing in a foreign language and rhetorical transfer: influences on raters' evaluations

Liz Hamp-Lyons

University of Edinburgh

It was suggested almost twenty years ago (Kaplan 1966) that rhetorical patterns differ from culture to culture: that while English expository writing has a 'linear' development, writing in other cultures develops in different rhetorical ways. Japanese, for example is typically pictured as developing through a spiralling rhetorical structure, circling the subject but not approaching it directly (Kaplan 1972, Onaka 1984). Contrastive rhetoric research into, for example, Arabic (Thompson-Panos & Tomas-Ruzic 1983, Koch 1984), French (Regent 1985), Spanish (Santiago 1968, Santana-Seda 1974), Japanese (Hinds 1983), Kobayashi 1984) and Greek (Tannen 1979 and 1980) has consistently supported the theory of cultural differences in the rhetorical structure of written discourse. There is besides a much larger body of research into differing rhetorical traditions of oral discourse (see for example, Tannen 1982).

It has often been argued that because the rhetorical structure of written discourse varies from language to language and culture to culture, nonnative writers of English can be expected to have difficulty with the unfamiliar rhetoric of English to a greater or lesser extent depending on their own culture's rhetorical differences from English. This is one of the reasons why 'modelling' (providing an input text and requiring the learner to produce a text of her own, in some ways parallel to the input) has long been a popular strategy in the teaching of writing. Modelling is still frequently recommended (see for example Dubin & Olshtain 1980, Johnson 1983, Weissberg 1984, Henna Stanchina 1985), and is found in current teaching materials, particularly for teaching academic writing (Johnson 1981, Reid 1982, Hamp-Lyons & Courter 1984, Hamp-Lyons & Heasley forthcoming).

The use of models in the teaching of writing has, however been called into question, notably by Zamel (1982), who suggests that Kaplan's work has led directly to the use of models in the writing classroom. She is concerned that

> '...this methodology can be misleading because it may give students the impression that the linear, straightforward writing that they are supposed to imitate is the result of a process that was itself linear. It fails to show students that the thinking and writing that preceded these models

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> may have been chaotic and disorganised and that their own attempts to write may involve this same disorder. The study of such models puts undue emphasis on the final and correct product and by doing so threatens students with the idea that they are expected to achieve the same level of competency.' (p206)

The concern Zamel expresses springs from her response to the research in first language composing, which in recent years has come to focus firmly on writing as process rather than as product (notably Murray 1968, Emig 1971, Shaughnessy 1977, Perl 1980, Flower & Hayes 1981). The view of writing which emerges from this research is of writing as heuristic, as a discovery process which is experimental, recursive and personal. In this and later work (Zamel 1983) Zamel reports her own research into composing in a second language, which supports the findings of the L1 research.

It may be that the 'to model or not to model' argument is one of degree rather than one of absolutes. The traditional read/analyse/write approach to which Zamel is so opposed is no longer, if it ever was, common in classrooms. The approach is far more likely to be the one Watson (1982) describes:

> 'If students can treat the model as a resource rather than an ideal, if they can explore it with each other as well as with the teacher, if they can comfortably compare their own products at various stages of composition with that of the professional, then the alien product is truly involving them in the writing process.' (p12)

Similarly, Johnson (1983) describes what he terms 'communicative writing' as (1) having a large analytic component and (2) being discourse-based. In this approach, the starting point is pieces of discourse exemplifying a specific set of writer intentions and of contextual features, which are explored in the analytic component; then the learners are required to perform specific operations, such as rhetorical transfer, on them before moving on to production. Raimes (1983) takes a similar view:

> 'I am not urging readings as models for imitation. ...I am using examination of what a writer says, of why and how she or he says it. ...In this way students see exactly what is involved in writing well, and learn more about what is expected of them when they write for a reader. (pp268-9)

Until and unless research evidence becomes available, the question of whether modelling is a successful teaching technique must remain academic. What I propose to do in this paper is to address what I see as the prior question: whether there is any indication that rhetorical transfer is actually a problem requiring treatment. That

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TABLE ONE

The Markers

Marker	A	B	C	D
Nationality	British	British	British	British
Age	35	28	30	43
Qualifications	MA TEFL	MA TEFL	MSc ApLg	MA TEFL, PhD
Yrs of TEFL	8	3	4	10+
Overseas exp.	S America Middle East	Japan	None	S America Middle East India

TABLE TWO

The Writers

Writer	Language background	Proficiency level
1	Chinese	Advanced
2	Chinese	U. intermediate/Advanced
3	Chinese	Upper intermediate
4	Chinese	Intermediate
5	Chinese	Lower intermediate
6	Arabic	Upper intermediate
7	Arabic	Intermediate
8	Arabic	Lower intermediate
9	Arabic	Elementary
10	Spanish	Advanced
11	Spanish	Intermediate
12	Spanish	Elementary
13	Japanese	pper intermediate
14	Japanese	Lower intermediate
15	German	Advanced
16	German	Intermediate
17	Korean	Advanced
18	Francophone-African	Upper intermediate
19	Greek	Intermediate
20	Indian	Advanced

is, does rhetorical transfer occur and if it does, do the differing rhetorical structures that student writers from other cultures bring to the task of writing in English affect the products of their writing in ways significant enough to have an effect on the grades assigned by experienced raters? I propose to do this, not by

analysing the products themselves, but by looking at the processes of the essay raters as they respond to those products.

For this study, EAP writing, i.e. expository prose of a broadly academic type, such as that commonly required on pre-sessional study skills courses in British universities, was chosen. It is often said that English academic prose discourse is expected to conform to highly conventionalised rhetorical patterns (cf Reid 1982, Nickson 1985); thus this type of discourse may be predicted to be very likely to show significant effects on raters if the conventions are not followed and their expectations are not fulfilled. Twenty essays written by nonnative English postgraduates of varying nationalities and language levels, taking a pre-sessional course at the Institute for Applied Language Studies, University of Edinburgh were each rated by four experienced markers. The four raters were all qualified and experienced teachers of English as a foreign language, who had all previously marked similar EAP essays. Table One briefly describes some characteristics of the markers.

Table Two summarises the language backgrounds and previously determined overall language level of the writers of the twenty essays. The writers' names and any other identifying information were removed from the scripts so that the raters had no information about the writers other than what they extracted from the essays.

In order to avoid 'contaminating' the raters by revealing the focus of the study, they were told that the purpose was marker training, i.e. a search for improved inter-rater reliability. All the marking took place at the same time and in the same room: raters were given a fixed amount of time in which to make their independent decision about a paper. Each rater in turn then reported scores and briefly described the features of the essay which led them to their decision. This was recorded, as was the ensuing, and often intervening, discussion of raters' differing perceptions of the essays. I now propose to discuss five short extracts from the recordings which I believe have particular bearing on the two questions I set myself earlier: does rhetorical transfer occur, and if it does, does it affect a student's writing in ways significant enough to be reflected in grades assigned by experienced raters?

Extract 1.
Discussion of writer 13.

D: He displays a good command of the language in deploying his argument...bearing in mind it's a divergent argument...it's an attempt to integrate his experience with the theme.

C: I'm not convinced...about the structure of the whole essay...which I think is lacking.

A: Yeah...I'd have to be convinced about the relevance of this

...second paragraph...it seems to me the argument is weak.

B: ...I think there's probably a sentence missing, to make that clearly support the decision he's made...because what he's trying to say with that is that... er... people in psychological experiments have thrown up some very interesting effects on people who are treated in this way and therefore it's more interesting to get this point of view... more interesting than the other one... I suppose what I've done is filled in a logical gap there. But I think there is a clear structure which perhaps needed something in between to support it, but I think it is relevant.

C: The language is very competent...I just found the supporting detail mildly irrelevant.

A: Yeah...not well structured...

The first extract is from the discussion of the essay by writer 13, an upper intermediate Japanese. It shows that two raters, A and C, are unable to follow the writer through the thread of discourse, while the other two raters, B and D, recognise that the discourse does not follow a conventional academic English rhetorical pattern but are tolerant of that fact. What comes through to me in A and C's comments is a sense of 'wrongness' about the discourse: what comes through from B and D is a sense of 'difference'. We know from research that in both oral narrative (Clancy 1980) and written discourse (Hinds 1983), Japanese speakers are able to use referential choice and sentence-position of referents to make their texts cohere in ways not available in English: this is what makes haiku so difficult to translate. We can postulate that such differences of coherence properties predispose, or at least permit, a different rhetoric. It is certainly true that Japanese writing in English often appears to 'circle' their main idea, surrounding it with responses, details and examples, but not making explicit the relationship holding between parts of the text. B, who is clearly able to interpret this text without difficulty, has taught in Japan. Later in the discussion he asked: 'Is it a Japanese? Yes, I could've told you. I'm used to...knowing the Japanese... certain cohesive gaps.' He is aware that the essay breaks the rules of academic discourse in English, but is able to read it as if it did not. D is also sympathetic to this piece of writing, although as far as I am aware he has not had a great deal of contact with Japanese writers. We might hypothesise that his longer and more diverse experience has made him more open in general; or perhaps that the rather long time he spent in Spanish-speaking South America, where personalisation of material is greatly valued, has predisposed him towards a personalised treatment of an argument. This would mean that it is the writer's perspective rather than his rhetoric which rater D is responding to. Clearly this is hypothesising pushed rather far, and the fact that rater A has also taught in Spanish-speaking South America (though for a much shorter

period) raises further questions. For the present, only two things can be said with confidence. Firstly, in discussion raters A and C responded negatively to the rhetorical structures of this essay, while raters B and D did not. Secondly, there were significant differences between the scores assigned by raters A and C and those assigned by raters B and D: raters B and D placed the writer at Upper Intermediate level, the same level as the overall proficiency measure, while raters A and C placed the writer at Intermediate level.

Extract 2.
Discussion of writer 20.

B: I found it going on and on and not coming to a nicely rounded proposition. I found it difficult to understand... on the communicative level.

C: ...although the vocabulary is very impressive at first, you think he's saying something and then - I don't think he is.

D: The structure is pompous but clear...it gives you the advantages first and then the disadvantages. The vocabulary is a bit...over-expressive, but I don't think you can penalise that...it's unfair to penalise him on the type of language he uses. The message is clear, if tendentious.

A: The argumentation, the organisation, was a bit obscure at times, it was difficult actually getting it through...He clearly has a nice grasp of the language.

D: Most raters would probably be seduced like I have been... by the bombast.

C: Well- that just put me off entirely. I thought, anybody who can write that sort of thing-...

D: But that's just a cultural thing.

The second extract is from the discussion of writer 20's essay. This writer is an Indian, and again this background is recognised and pointed out later in the discussion. The discussion seems to focus on the way the language is used at the lexical and syntactic levels (long, complex sentences and what is called 'flowery' vocabulary), and the structure of the argument. As the extract shows, rater B finds it difficult to understand; rater C agrees; rater A approves the language, but has difficulty with the argument; rater C finds the argument perfectly clear, and in fact reconstructs it for the other raters, but has ambiguous feelings about the language. Raters A and D, who both have a background in Classics, respond most favourably to the language the writer uses, rater A considering that the writer has a 'nice grasp' of the language, and rater D being 'seduced' by it. However, rater A, who has not had significant exposure to students using Indian English, has problems with the argument, whereas rater D, who has taught in the sub-continent, does not. I am not familiar with contrastive

rhetoric research into Indian Languages and English, or into 'Indian English' and English, and cannot offer more than intuitions on the relationship between the undeniably embellished linguistic code employed and the rhetorical structure of the text as a whole. My intuitions suggest that rater D is right, that the rhetorical structure is not only there, it is there in essentially the same form as it would be in standard (academic) English. For many readers, however, it seems so buried under the linguistic embellishments that they can't find it. In the event, rater D scored the paper as Upper Intermediate; raters A and B scored it as Intermediate, though D's score was lower than A's; rater C scored it as Lower Intermediate. Writer 20's overall proficiency level was Advanced.

Extract 3.
Discussion of writer 19.

C: ... So many linguistic errors there...
A: ... but the message is fairly clear...
C: mmmh
A: ...but the language...sort of...really...gets in the way...but in terms of argument, of organisation, it's much better...I dunno quite...what to...
C: ...no...
B: I found that I had the same problem: linguistically and orthographically it's very poor, and yet its argument, its message, is clearly good.

The third extract comes from writer 19, who is Greek, and it offers an example of a different kind. The raters are in fact quite well agreed that linguistically the essay is rather poor, but that the structure of the essay is good. The rhetorical structure is, in fact, both coherent and cohesive in terms of the conventions of English academic discourse. There are, however, virtually no error-free syntactic strings. The scores eventually assigned by the raters were all in the Upper Intermediate range, while writer 19's overall proficiency level was Intermediate. None of the raters had taught in Greece nor, as far as I know, had more than occasional exposure to Greek students. The research I have read (Tannen 1979 and 1980) suggests that Greeks learn control of the classical Aristotelian rhetorical forms very early and can use them fluently in oral discourse, selecting among a repertoire of rhetorical patterns to suit the context of discourse. It may be that the same is true for written discourse. As our rhetorical tradition descends, however indirectly, from Aristotle, it seems reasonable to expect Greek and English to share many common features.

Extract 4.
Discussion of writer 11.

B: The first three lines seem to be a restatement of the question...the bit that is his own is extremely poor, says virtually nothing and with many inaccuracies.

A: ...The message I can work out very easily...one or two mistakes but certainly not many.

C: I honestly don't know what he wants to say.

A: I think the only real error there...'that processes' rather than 'those processes'...rest of it is unusual but makes sense (reads from script) I mean if you use a different intonation...you find a 'not only - but also' structure.

My fourth extract relates to writer 11, a South American whose first language is Spanish. There has been quite a lot of research, particularly in the United States, on the difference between Hispanic and Anglo-Saxon learning styles, field-dependence and field independence (Beard 1981), and on rhetorical transfer into English by Spanish speakers (Santana-Seda 1974, Santiago 1968). The essay is very short, but probably contains more error-free strings than did the Greek writer's essay. Interestingly, rater A, who reacted negatively to the Japanese and Indian essays, responds favourably to this one: 'The message I can work out easily' (does he mean perhaps that although it is an effort, it isn't much of one?). Rater A scored this essay as Intermediate, though at the lower end. Rater D (also with teaching experience in South America) also scored it as Intermediate. Raters B and C scored it as Elementary. The writer's overall proficiency level was towards the top of the Intermediate range.

Extract 5.
Discussion of writer 4.

D: ...if you ignore the numbers there's no connection between these points.

A: No, but numbering is a way of doing it...it impresses people so that they don't then look at the internal logic. You can't knock it.

D: No you CAN knock it. It hasn't...I mean...this is note form...you don't use numbers...

A: It's NOT note form.

D: It IS...you don't use numbers in a...in connected writing.

A: But in EAP...

The fifth extract comes from a Chinese writer, writer 4. I chose this one as an example of a phenomenon many of us who teach EAP, particularly intensive, pre-sessional EAP, are aware of: the 'pre-sessional overlay'. Raters A and D clearly disagree quite strongly about whether this veneer of English academic rhetoric -

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if numbering and laying out points on separate lines deserves so grand a term - has any value. Notice that they don't disagree about whether the underlying appropriate rhetorical structure exists: they both recognise that it doesn't. But rater D suddenly reveals himself as a purist: tolerant of alternative rhetorical structures in other instances, he can't accept this 'playing the system'. Rater A takes a more pragmatic approach: 'It's a way of doing it'. When the dust settled the disagreement expressed itself in a significantly lower score from rater D than from rater A. D placed the student at Elementary level, B and C at Lower Intermediate, and A at Intermediate. The writer's overall proficiency level was Lower Intermediate.

DISCUSSION

Table 3 shows how each rater marked each of the writers in relation to his/her overall proficiency score.

TABLE THREE

Ratings compared with overall proficiency scores

Writer	13	20	19	11	4
Rater A	-	-	+	=	+
B	=	-	+	-	=
C	-	-	+	-	=
D	=	-	ND	=	-

\- rating was lower than overall proficiency score
\+ rating was higher than overall proficiency score
= rating matched overall proficiency score
ND no data available

If we look at the pattern of rater responses shown in Table Three we see that most essays were rated low relative to measured overall proficiency. The pattern is not the same for all language backgrounds, however.

Let me remind you at this juncture of my starting point, which was the use of modelling as a teaching technique. I wanted to explore whether there was any basis for an approach to the teaching of writing which is product-oriented rather than process-oriented: i.e. do students need to be told, or shown, what the rhetorical structure of academic written discourse in English should be? I wanted to do this through a small-scale process study rather than through a large-scale study because of the tremendous number of variables inherent in any study of essay test scores, not least of

which is lack of reliability. I wanted to watch and listen to the raters actually trying to do the job, and see if any insights could emerge.

My five samples were chosen as the most striking ocurrences in the data of apparent response by raters to rhetorical features: it was chance that the five came from different language backgrounds. I believe that in the data as a whole there are enough indications that there is rhetorical transfer, and that this does have an effect on what raters do, to warrant further study in this area. I also feel that, even with so small a corpus, a whole range of areas have been revealed about which we need to know more. Why was the Indian writer's essay so dramatically downgraded while the Greek writer's work was upgraded? Why did the Arab writers' essays cause no particular problems and show an even spread of rater responses? Is rater D's reaction to 'pre-sessional overlay' at all representative? If so, what does this say about modelling as a teaching technique, since clearly the Chinese writer got his notion of the rhetorical structure of academic English from somewhere. Is a little learning a dangerous thing, and what can we do about it?

CONCLUSION

While the concern of Zamel and others with research into second language writing is clearly a fruitful one, I hope I have shown here that there remains a role for research into the product. I am sympathetic with the impatience that led Zamel to declare 'the investigation of students' written products tells us very little about their instructional needs' (1983, p165), but I believe that she overstated her case. I believe that by looking at the interactions between the student's product, and the score assigned, we can learn a good deal about what needs to be taught, and perhaps something about how it should be taught. For many years the linguistic accuracy of writing was stressed in scoring essays; more recently, ideas, or 'invention' in Aristotelian terms have been stressed. Weir (1984) showed that in subject-specific academic writing content is the priority. What I think these data show in a small way is that structure is important too - usually more important than strictly linguistic factors, though less so than content. Nickson (1985) agrees.

The raters I worked with were all well-qualified and experienced EFL teachers; all of them had taught EAP, and all of them had experience of scoring EAP essays. The tendencies observed in them would, we might hypothesise, be even more marked in less exceptional raters. There are two things we can do: we can train raters to know their prejudices and try to overcome them; and we can help students to fit into the rhetorical conventions of English academic written discourse, as long as we do it well. At the same

time, we need more research to help us know the scale and the shape of the problem.

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